

Membership Manual and Speaking Guide



Founded 1831

of the
***Washington Literary Society
And Debating Union***
at the University of Virginia

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MEMBERSHIP

Although all members of the University community are encouraged to observe and participate in meetings of the Washington Society, provisional members must fulfill certain requirements in order to be inducted as active, voting members. The requirements are the following:

- **Provisional members must attend two-thirds of the meetings for the semester in which they wish to be initiated. In order to fulfill this requirement, provisional members must be present for both the literary presentations and debate at each meeting.**
- **Provisional members must pay dues for the semester in which he or she wishes to be inducted into the Society. As of Fall 2005, dues are thirty-five dollars per semester or sixty-five dollars per year. Spring Provisionals need only pay dues for one semester.**
- **Provisional members must present to the society a prepared literary presentation previously heard and approved by the Vice-President, President, or other designated officer.**
- **Provisional members must participate in a prepared debate before the Society. The Vice-president will assign a topic and partner to each provisional before the debate in order for them to prepare a case.**
- **Provisional members must fulfill a service requirement to the Society to be determined by the Vice-President. In past semesters, services to the society have involved cleanup after parties, judging in one of the tournaments we hold, or aiding an officer in the execution of his or her job. These examples do not limit possible service activities, however.**

After the provisional semester, the only requirement for maintaining active membership and all the benefits that entails is the payment of dues on either a semester-to-semester or annual basis.

SPEAKING SKILLS

Even the best pieces of literature or the greatest speeches in Parliamentary debate history will seem boring and uninteresting unless they are delivered in a manner that will keep the audience's attention. Speaking style is not something that can be taught in a few pages. The best way to improve your style is to practice. The next best is to watch excellent debaters and public speakers and try to emulate them. The following pointers may help to combat some of the common stylistic problems faced by both active and provisional members of the Washington Society.

Verbal Tools

- **Volume:** This is the most common problem for members of the Washington Society. Just think: If your audience cannot hear you, then they will not understand what you are saying and thus not pay attention. Some rooms do not have excellent acoustics, which further amplifies this problem. (Har har.) Always pay attention to your volume. When in doubt, speak louder.
- **Pitch:** If you sound bored with your presentation, your audience will think it is boring. Vary your pitch and inflect when appropriate. Try and use different voices and accents (if you are comfortable with them), especially if there is more than one speaker in your presentation,
- **Speed:** When you're not sure if you're going too fast, go slower. As a general rule, talk in the same manner as you would in a regular conversation.
- **Pauses:** These are great for dramatic effect. They make the audience process your last words for a longer period of time and thus give them more emphasis. Additionally, they enable you to look up and connect with the audience.
- **Articulate:** Remember, the audience can't see the words on the page in front of you. Make sure you read them the entire word.

Non-Verbal Tools

- **Eye Contact:** Probably the single most important aspect of non-verbal communication. Many speakers look like they are talking to their feet or to God. Though God may indeed be listening, your feet are not. Don't be that speaker.
 - Making eye contact may be difficult but remember that no one in the audience is a stranger. Each and every one of them came to the meeting

in order to hear what you have to say: don't be afraid to talk directly to them.

Gestures: Use your hands, point at things, and engage the audience with your physical movements! Don't overdo it, though, or you may become more well known for your crazy arms than your oratorical pyrotechnics.

- Personal Appearance: No, the Washington Society does not have a dress code for presenters. But if you want to be treated with respect in a debate, you might want to look nice and respectable. All it can do is improve your speech; it can't hurt.

Also:

- Look comfortable, move around, make yourself at home behind (or not behind) the podium.
- Be familiar with your speech. Practice your lit beforehand and think over your debate before you get up. Mark written texts for pauses, and have your debate points clearly enumerated.
- Try to refrain from using "like" or "um". Can you imagine Demosthenes saying "Well like, those Macedonians are like soooo uncool for beating us at, like, Chaeronea." No, you can't.
- If you make a mistake, don't apologize or get flustered. We are all behind you and have been in your position before. We understand that it may be hard the first few times. There have been worse mistakes made, by many other people. Take a breath, regain your confidence, and go on with your presentation.
- You'll get better every time you present. So keep practicing.

OTHER DEBATE FORMATS

Lincoln/Douglas

A one-on-one debate focusing on moral and philosophical issues. Unlike propositions of policy, Lincoln/Douglas debate rarely has as the subject what is feasible, but instead attempts to decide what is most desirable, even if this goal is unattainable. An example of a resolution would be: Resolved, that violence in response to political oppression is justified. Here, statistics as to numbers of lives lost in certain revolts would be irrelevant. The debate would most likely center on the values of freedom and human life.

Policy

Resolutions generally present a problem, and the opposing sides argue, with statistics at hand, what is the best way to solve it (and whether a solution is really necessary). Here, the feasibility of certain solutions is very relevant. An example of a resolution would be: Resolved that the United States should significantly increase spending on urban housing projects.

N.D.T and C.E.D.A

The Cross Examination Debate Association and other similar national collegiate formats are basically advanced Policy formats. Their competitive circuits present a certain resolution that is to be debated for an entire semester or year, and many schools begin to prepare (through case writing and research) far in advance.

Panels and Special Events

Occasionally, the Washington Society conducts special debates. One style, Division of the House, divides the House into two camps and allows debate until everyone has spoken, if they so desire. At the conclusion, a vote is taken and the side with a majority wins the debate. In the spring semester, the Jefferson Society and the Washington Society face off in the Smith-Simpson debate that focuses on current issues in United States diplomacy. In the past, we have invited members of the Miller Center to debate issues of foreign policy with us, and done humorous debates with both the Jefferson Society and the Whethermen.

of order, a debater should rise and state "point of order." Briefly state the violation of the rule in question. The speaker holding the floor should stop speaking and remain silent until the point is stated, and the Speaker has ruled it well taken or not well taken. If a point is ruled well taken, the time involved in raising the point will be deducted from the speaker's time. If the point is ruled not well taken, no time will be deducted from the speaker.

While a point of order is being offered or is under deliberation, the speaker holding the floor has no right to respond. Rulings are final and may not be appealed or contradicted by either team. Points of order may be brought in a number of circumstances:

- New argument in rebuttal: If a speaker offers a new point not previously introduced during the round in rebuttal, or attempts to respond to an argument introduced early in the round and has yet to be responded to the opposing team should rise on a point of order. If the point is ruled well taken, the new argument will be disregarded by the judges, and the speaker will not be allowed to continue discussion of it. The judge may not, however, unilaterally dismiss a new point in rebuttal; the burden lies on the two teams to watch out for new arguments.
- A speaker exceeding time limits: After the expiration of their allotted speaking time, each speaker will generally be allowed a 30 second "grace period" to wrap up their speech. If a speaker exceeds this time, a member of the opposing team may rise on a point of order. If ruled well-taken, the speaker holding the floor must conclude their speech immediately and sit down.

Points of Personal Privilege

If a debater feels that a member of the opposing team has seriously misquoted, misrepresented, or insulted him or her, he or she may rise on a point of personal privilege. The procedure for stating, deciding upon and timing a point of personal privilege is similar to that used for a point of order. If the point is ruled well-taken, the speaker holding the floor must withdraw the objectionable remark, and may then continue. Only rise on a point of personal privilege in a case of clear misrepresentation or defamation. Also, give the opposing side some leeway -- slight sarcasm or making fun of your case is par for the course, and if you rise in marginal cases such as this you may look as if you are overreacting. Use your best judgment, and keep an eye to the judge to guess his opinion. Generally in the Washington Society, points of personal privilege are rarely used.

LITERARY PRESENTATIONS

Choosing a piece

First of all, you want to make sure that the piece you are to present is appropriate to you and that you feel comfortable presenting it to the Washington Society. People have presented fiction, non-fiction, things they found online, things they've written themselves, parts of plays, and songs. However, something novel which has never been considered for presentation might prove to be worthwhile and successful. Choose something that you feel passionate about sharing with the Society: preparations will become easy and fun, and the audience will pick up on your passion for the work.

If a presentation is too long, it might not keep the attention of the audience enough to be understood and appreciated. Ten minutes or less will usually be sufficient, and people might get twitchy after about fifteen. Have your practice audience time you when you read through it.

Practice

Every provisional shall practice his or her presentation in front of an experienced member of the Society before they give their provisional lit. However, practice should not be limited to provisionals. Members should also practice their lits beforehand, alone and in front of an audience. Practice cannot be stressed enough: it will lead to greater comfort with the piece, you have to refer less to the piece of paper or book in your hands, and you will be able to engage the audience with greater frequency. If you care enough to present a piece to the Society, take the time to make sure you present it to the best of your abilities.

Contests

Each year, the Washington Society sponsors two literary contests. The fall contest focuses on oratory, and features non-original works. The spring contest is for original works. Both contests are judged by a panel of University professors, and are open to the University community at large.

DEBATE BASICS

Every week, the Washington Society holds a debate amongst its own members or with special invited guests. However, the Society also sponsors “APDA,” which is the only intercollegiate debate team at UVA. The American Parliamentary Debate Association is one of the most widespread collegiate debate formats and tournaments are held close to every weekend at schools across the country. American parliamentary debate is a formal contest of reason, wit and rhetorical skill, and simulates debate in a theoretical House of Parliament. In parliamentary debate, emphasis is placed on quick thinking, logical argumentation, and analysis, and command of rhetoric over extensive research or collection of evidence. Accordingly, no recorded evidence or other outside written material need be consulted during the round.

The debates that the Washington Society holds are quite similar to a standard APDA round, though there are differences that will be described below. There are two teams in a parliamentary round, the Government and the Opposition. It is the job of the Government to persuade the judge(s) to change the status quo by adopting the resolution and, quite obviously, it is the job of the Opposition to show the detrimental effects of the resolution or that the need for a solution to the Government’s proposed problem is unnecessary. Thus the burden of proof (and the harder job) lies with the Government.

Each debater is given a title that is dependent on the order in which they speak. On the Government side, there is the Prime Minister (PM) and the Member of Government (MG). On the Opposition side, there is the Leader of the Opposition (LO) and Member of the Opposition (MO). There are also two types of speeches made: constructives and rebuttals. Each team leader makes one constructive speech in which he or she introduces independent points of analysis. These points are used to introduce specific arguments that can be used to prove one side of the case or the other. Each team member then speaks in turn. The only two people allowed to make rebuttals, which are the final two speeches of the round, are the PM and LO. In these speeches, the introduction of new arguments is prohibited. Instead, each side must summarize (crystallize is the term used by debaters) their arguments and convince the judge that their independent points are strong and have not been substantially refuted by the other side. The only time during rebuttals in which new arguments can be made is in response to the independent points brought up by the MO in his or her constructive.

should rise, put his hand on his head, and indicate that he wishes to offer a point by saying "Point of information" or "On that point." The speaker holding the floor has absolute discretion over whether or not to accept a point of information; this should be indicated within 10 or 15 seconds after the time the other debater rose. If the point is refused, the individual should sit down. If the point is accepted, the individual may direct a short question or comment to the speaker. POIs should be no more than 15 seconds in length and will count against the time of the speaker holding the floor. POIs may be offered between the first and last minutes of the four constructive speeches, but are prohibited during rebuttals. It is generally recommended that each speaker accept two or three POIs during his or her speech, and offer several during his or her opponents' speeches, so long as it does not become overly disruptive. Speakers should not interrupt the flow of their speeches to accept a POI; rather, finish your sentence or idea before accepting. It is legitimate to tell a debater that you will not accept their point at this time, but will take it later in the round.

POIs are particularly useful for a number of purposes:

- To ask for clarification: If you are unclear about any portion of the case or are unsure of what they meant in an independent point, POIs are useful in gaining more information or to clear up confusion so that the debate can flow more smoothly.
- To point out a contradiction in the opposing team's argument: If a speaker blatantly contradicts what his partner previously stated, rise on a point of information to point out this contradiction and hurt the other team's credibility.
- To respond to an argument made by the opposing team: Just as in a constructive speech, a speaker may use a POI to directly challenge an argument made by the speaker holding the floor. Particularly if the argument just made relies primarily on emotional, unsubstantiated assertion, 15 seconds may be enough to greatly damage it. Be careful, however. If the speaker can immediately fire back with a valid counter-response, the original argument may seem stronger than ever.
- To point out a fact missed or misstated by the other team: Sometimes, a speaker will, either intentionally or unintentionally, buttress his arguments with faulty or irrelevant factual claims. While parliamentary debate is not primarily concerned with empirical disputes, pointing out an obvious factual inaccuracy will weaken your opponents' case.

Points of Order

A point of order is an objection to a breach of the rules of debate. Debaters raise them while one of the members of the other team is speaking. To offer a point

debate. In APDA debates however, the Opposition will challenge the use of spec knowledge or a case built around such information.

The Time-Space Case

The time-space case places the Speaker in the position of a person, group of people, entity, etc. other than his or her true identity as Speaker. The Government team may also place the speaker in a time frame other than the present. The Speaker is to judge the case as if he were actually the person (or persons) indicated by the Government team -- thinking within the assigned time frame. An example may be Resolved: You are George Washington; don't resign your command of the Continental Army. The Speaker now has to pretend that the year is 1783 and he or she is George Washington himself. Thus, no arguments stating or even hinting at what happens in the future can be introduced.

Countercase

A countercase is a plan put forth by the Opposition that attempts to solve the problem presented by the Government more effectively than the Government plan would. A countercase may be almost any plan that usurps the Government's advantages without the Government's disadvantages -- the only rule is that a countercase must be mutually exclusive. This either means that both policies could not go into effect simultaneously or that enacting both policies would be unnecessary.

MO Dump

The MO's constructive speech is the last speech in the round in which new independent points can be introduced. Certain Opp teams will use this to their advantage by having the MO give many new points in his speech. Since the PM in his rebuttal must respond to each of the MO's points (remember that dropping points might result in a loss) an MO dump of about 5–7 points will occupy the PM's valuable time and not allow him to do fulfill his other responsibilities. Though this strategy may prevent the MO from refuting the Government's points with as much authority as he or she should, it is a strategy that might work out in the end.

Opp Choice

Allows the Government to formulate the topic completely, and the opposition to pick which side they want to argue.

Points of Information (POI)

A point of information is a question or statement directed to the speaker holding the floor by a member of the opposing team. To offer a POI, the debater

In Washington Society debates, the Speaker is the President or another officer sitting in place of the President. In APDA rounds, the Speaker is the person judging or the chair, if there happens to be a panel of judges. It is customary before each speech to say "Thank you Mr./Madame Speaker", and then proceed to thank the team opposing you, ending with praise for your partner saying something like "And I'd like to thank my partner for his/her eloquence." Get creative with your introductory remarks, if you like.

As you know, in the Washington Society, cases will be provided before the round. However, in APDA rounds, the Government must create a case ten minutes before the round and the Opposition only learns of the resolution during the first speech by the Prime Minister. Cases should involve some change in the status quo. For example, "Resolved: Texas should adopt a death penalty law" is a status quo resolution because Texas already has one. However, "Resolved: Texas should abolish its death penalty law" is a change in current policy and thus not a status quo case.

Independent points of analysis (IPs) are the core of any debate. Generally, the PM's first speech should have no less than three or more than five independent points. If you have too little, consider breaking them up into more specific points. On the other hand, if you have too many, consider condensing them into smaller groups and creating larger points to encompass the smaller ones. When presenting an independent point, use whole sentences. For example say, "My first point of independent analysis is that gun ownership by children is not beneficial to having a peaceful country." From there, the debater can have sub-points that build upon the previous statement. Examples include the increased likelihood of family member deaths, the increase of belligerency in young kids, etc.

A strict rule in debate is that all arguments brought up by your opponent must be responded to or else they are considered "dropped". If the PM brings up a point and the LO does not respond to it in his or her speech, then it is dropped and cannot be argued by the Opp again in the round. Judges will note this drop, especially if the Gov points it out, and it will count against you in the end. As a rule of thumb, if the opposition makes something that might even sound like an independent point, give some response to it. Even if it is not good, your partner may have a better idea and will build upon it in the next speech.

DEBATE ROUND FORMAT

Prime Minister Constructive (PMC)	6 min (7 min APDA)
Give clear and precise case statement	
Support case with several independent arguments	
3-6 Independent Points	
Leader of the Opposition Constructive (LOC)	6 min (8 min APDA)
Provide opposition philosophy	
Announce opposition strategy/counter case	
Introduce independent analysis	
Rebut PMC arguments	
3-5 Independent Points	
Member of the Government Constructive (MGC)	6 min (8 min APDA)
Provide overviews	
Attack Opposition independent analysis	
Rebuild/review Government case	
Introduce new arguments	
2-4 Independent Points	
Member of the Opposition Constructive (MOC)	6 min (8 min APDA)
Review Opposition philosophy	
Introduce new points and analysis	
Cover main issues	
Counter Member of Government	
Set Government burdens	
2-7 Independent Points (MO Dump under Debating Terms)	
Floor Speeches	2 minutes each
Leader of Opposition Rebuttal (LOR)	4 min (4 min APDA)
Address main issues	NO NEW ARGUMENTS
Crystallize with new examples	ALLOWED!!!!
Conclusion	
Prime Minister Rebuttal (PMR)	4 min (5 min APDA)
Respond to MO's new arguments	NO NEW ARGUMENTS
Summarize Round	ALLOWED!!!!
Address crucial issues	(except in response to new
Crystallize with new examples	arguments made in MO)
Conclusion	

DEBATING TERMS

Truism

A case is too narrow if there are no convincing arguments against it, or if it simply supports an uncontroversial status quo. Such a case is called a truism, and is prohibited. A case can be a truism even if there are some random possible arguments to be made against the proposition. It is considered a truism, for example, that orphans should not be beaten for any particular reason, although there is the possible argument that some orphans may deserve corporal punishment. The line separating a fair case from a truism is necessarily blurry, but should be apparent in most instances -- it's more than fair to ask an Opposition to oppose affirmative action programs, but not to condone active and unjustified racial discrimination against minorities.

Tautology

A tautology is a case that is true by definition. Suppose the Government runs "Coke is it." The PM then goes on to define "it" as "a sweet-flavored soft drink." This type of argument is a tautology, sometimes referred to as "circular logic." Another example: the Government runs that "Bob Dylan should not plug in and use an electrical guitar. The Government then defines Bob Dylan as a folk singer who should never use an electric because it is not in his nature to betray his fans, and by using an electric guitar he will be losing current fans. In addition, the Government states that his current fans are better than any other fans he could possibly attract because they provide him with excellent "benefits." In this case, the Opposition may be able to say that Dylan will get new fans, but the Government has already defined the case in such a manner that his current fans are the best and thus are irreplaceable. The Government has thus defined the Opposition into a corner. This is not allowed.

Specific Knowledge ("Spec" Knowledge)

Detailed facts about a case that are not considered common knowledge are called specific knowledge. The subject of the case must be comprised of general knowledge, or fall under the guideline "what an informed college student would be familiar with." It is assumed that debaters will have a working knowledge of major issues in international and national affairs, basic Western philosophy and fundamental documents. References to such sources or events are not considered specialized knowledge. The phenomena of spec knowledge will not likely occur with Washington Society debates since both sides are aware of the topic before the